

# TEXAS HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD



*September 1, 2020*

## **Response to formal request for information House Committee on Higher Education COVID-19 Pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruption to institutions of higher education, students, and the Texas workforce. Many students and their families have found their financial circumstances suddenly changed due to the health and economic shock of the pandemic. Institutions of higher education have had to rethink and significantly reshape their operations to provide quality instruction and support while adhering to necessary health and safety protocols. Both students and institutions face continued uncertainty as the pandemic continues to unfold.

In the face of these challenges, Texas institutions of higher education continue to rise to the occasion. They have stayed strongly committed to their educational mission, and to meeting the growing needs of their students. Over the last several months, leaders across all institutions – two-year and four-year, public and private – swiftly adapted campus operations to provide remote instruction, advising and student support services. And they have worked with their students to identify specific needs and how best to accommodate them.

### **COORDINATING BOARD RESOURCES FOR COVID-19**

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's primary role since the beginning of the crisis has been to act as a facilitator, partner, and advocate for institutions of higher education as they confront the myriad of impacts COVID-19 has created on their campuses. Specifically, the agency continues to:

- serve as a resource to Texas colleges and universities, helping to collect information and address challenges institutions face in response to the disruption caused by COVID-19;
- work with the Governor, legislative leadership, and other agencies to ensure maximum flexibility of rules and regulations to help institutions adapt to the current public health emergency and continue to serve students, and;
- collaborate with public and private institutions of higher education across the state to adapt to the changes that may be needed to ensure continuity of operation and instruction for students.

The Coordinating Board established a [Coronavirus Resources webpage](#) to give institutions a central hub for information regarding issues arising at campuses as a result of the pandemic, relevant resources to address questions, other institutions' plans regarding reopening, and notifications of important actions taken by state and federal policymakers. This includes a collection of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) across a broad-range of institutional functions and concerns – career and technical education (CTE), academic instruction, reporting, tuition and fees, financial aid, and general campus operations.

In July, the agency posted [guidance regarding the reopening of campus operations for the Fall 2020 semester](#). The guidance includes a checklist of recommended health protocols for safely resuming in-person instruction at public and private postsecondary institutions across Texas. This checklist is based on what is currently known about COVID-19, and incorporates existing federal and state public health and safety recommendations directed at postsecondary institutions.

## **FEDERAL FUNDS FOR INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (H.R. 748) includes \$30.75 billion for an Education Stabilization Fund for states, school districts, and institutions of higher education for costs related to coronavirus. Of this amount, \$14 billion was specifically dedicated to higher education, and is allocated as follows:

- 90% directly to institutions of higher education using a formula weighted toward the number of Pell Grant recipients enrolled at the institution;
- 7.5% to minority-serving institutions (MSIs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); and
- 2.5% to institutions receiving less than \$500,000 from the previous two pools of funding, to bring them up to that amount.

In total, Texas institutions of higher education received approximately \$1 billion through these funds.

In July, Governor Abbott and legislative leadership announced the state will invest \$175 million in CARES Act funding through the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund for Texas higher education. This funding will help students continue or restart their progress toward earning a post-secondary credential or degree, and includes:

- \$57 million to help preserve FY20-21 funding for the TEXAS Grant, Texas Educational Opportunity Grant (TEOG), and Tuition Equalization Grant (TEG) programs that serve students with financial need at Texas public universities, public community and technical colleges, and independent colleges and universities;
- \$46.5 million in emergency educational aid so students who have been financially impacted by COVID-19 can stay enrolled in higher education;
- \$46.5 million in targeted financial aid for upskilling and reskilling displaced workers with high-value credentials, including workers who have earned some college credit but no credential, allowing new paths into the workforce with higher earning potential;
- \$15 million for strategic education and workforce data infrastructure to provide timely, actionable intelligence to students, institutions, employers, and policymakers; scale and expand existing technologies and tools that support college and career advising; and help students stay on track to earn high-value credentials; and
- \$10 million to improve the quality of online learning by strengthening distance education course offerings and bolstering institutions' capabilities to use data to support student success. This will include funds to develop Open Educational Resource course materials that significantly reduce costs to students.

## TEXAS EMERGENCY AID GRANT PROGRAM

One of the items that was quickly identified as a priority was to provide increased aid to students who suddenly found themselves subject to unexpected needs. These needs include: emergency aid for costs such as healthcare, child care, and housing; support for services such as food pantries and clothes closets; and technology supports such as laptops and hotspots. There was also a need to build institutional capacity to support emergency aid programs.

To help meet this need, the Texas Higher Education Foundation, in partnership with Greater Texas Foundation and Trellis Foundation, launched the collaborative [Texas Emergency Aid Grant Program](#) to support students across Texas public and private higher education institutions during the COVID-19 crisis. This initiative allows institutions to apply for grants from the Foundation to support their emergency aid programs and provide direct or indirect assistance to students impacted by COVID-19.

With initial anchor funding of \$711,000 from partners and individual contributions, the Foundation was able to award grants to 57 of the 121 institutions that applied for funding. Grants varied from \$10,000 to \$20,000 and were prioritized based on financial need of the student body of the institution with different weights for community colleges and universities. The Foundation continues to raise funds for this effort and will make additional awards to institutions.

## COVID-19 IMPACT ON ENROLLMENT

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on enrollment at institutions of higher education is difficult to predict and may be subject to different and countervailing pressures. Historically, institutions of higher education have seen increases in enrollment during economic downturns. This pattern is particularly pronounced at community and technical colleges. But it is still uncertain how the ongoing pandemic will impact enrollment during the fall 2020 semester and beyond.

The Coordinating Board undertook a [survey of summer 2020 preliminary headcount enrollments](#) at Texas public universities, technical, state, and community colleges and health-related institutions (final certified data will be available in the fall). This preliminary data showed that summer enrollments statewide increased 11 percent over a year earlier. However, there was considerable variation in summer enrollment patterns across institutions. While 32 of 38 universities showed increases from 2019 to 2020, some smaller regional universities had significant decreases. Approximately two-thirds of community colleges showed increased enrollments compared to summer 2019, but the range in the percent of increase or decrease varied from -87% to +107% for Summer I enrollments. Enrollments at Texas State Technical Colleges are down, and enrollment in CTE programs is down at other two-year institutions. Preliminary enrollment data for the Fall 2020 semester will be available in October.